

# Tigers Showcase Various Ranks In Outstanding Night With Football Scrimmages

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville High School football team showcased its various ranks from the younger players to the freshman, to junior varsity and varsity in an excellent outing Friday night at Edwardsville High School.

As always, the preseason is about getting ready for the upcoming season ahead, which will be a regular nine-week schedule in its regular fall slate after coming off an abbreviated spring season earlier this year because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Tigers had a very successful campaign, going 4-2 in the six-week season, finishing second in the Southwestern Conference after losing the championship game to East St. Louis 50-47 on April 23.

The Tigers have a mixture of experienced players returning from the spring season and youth, and as usual, preseason practice is about getting the team ready for the upcoming season.

"Right now, the focus is on us, trying to get better," Martin said.

The Tigers lost star running back Justin Johnson, Jr., along with quarterback Ryan Hampton, to graduation, with Johnson getting ready to play for West Virginia University this fall. Junior Jordan Bush is set to replace Johnson as the number one back, while the quarterback post has a pair of solid athletes - junior James Distaso-Hutchins and sophomore Jake Curry available for the slot.

The offensive line also returns very experienced players. with senior right guard Tyler Ragland, senior left guard Lane Kaburick and senior center Austin Wolfe the key

returnees. Senior wide receiver Jordan Brooks also provides experience at the position, along with senior David Deuanephenh and sophomore Kellen Brnfre.

The defensive line also returns experience in senior third-year starter Nasim Cairo, along with fellow senior Colton Carstens. senior Carson Forsting, sophomore Dalton Brown and senior Chase Parker also are back in the fold for the Tigers. A key freshman will be Iose Epenesa, the younger brother of former Edwardsville standout A.J. Epenesa, who had a successful rookie season last year for the Buffalo Bills, while junior Johnnie Robinson leads the Tiger secondary. Gavin Walls returns to the team as kicker, and he'll also see duty with the Tigers' soccer team this fall.

"We've still got guys competing for spots," Martin said."

The schedule is loaded with quality teams - and that's before the Southwestern Conference season is set to begin. The Tigers open Aug. 27 at St. Louis power DeSmet Jesuit, then travel to Highland the next week before opening their home season against Champaign Central Sept. 10. The Tigers then travel to O'Fallon to open the conference season Sept. 17 in a rematch of their incredible 43-40 double-overtime win over the Panthers, then are at Belleville West, host Alton, and are at Belleville East before hosting the Flyers on Oct. 15, and finish the regular season at home Oct. 22 against CBC.

"We're playing quality teams, so we have to be at our best," Martin said.

A good thing about the shortened time between seasons is that the learning curve isn't as steep, and many of the players have retained much of the system going into preseason practice.

"I've seen some good retention by the returning guys," Martin said, "but we've got some new guys who need to catch up."





[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)